

Public Safety Appreciation Week is October 4 – October 10. During this week, the entire Cobb Community will come together to honor and recognize first responders who risk their lives daily to protect ours. This week is also a great reminder that public safety is the most important service that local governments provide.

I am proud of Cobb County's steadfast commitment to proactively supporting law enforcement and first responders. In 2014, the Board of Commissioners put their unanimous support behind a Public Safety Plan. The plan was developed to ensure we are exceeding community expectations, building and developing our team and preparing for the future. Team Cobb has been working for the past two years to implement this plan and I am pleased to report that we are making progress on all levels. The 2016 budget includes a \$197 million investment in public safety, or 56 percent of the entire general fund.

In 2015, the Board approved 40 new police officer positions. Following a successful year of improved hiring and retention, an additional 40 positions and funding to equip all 80 positions was approved as part of the FY 2016 budget.

Building and retaining talent is a top priority. In 2015, shift differential pay went into effect in the Police Department and Sheriff's Office and 10 hour shifts for police officers was implemented. This is an effective deployment method that results in better police coverage, less overtime and an improved quality of life for officers. Education incentive pay was approved as part of the FY 2016 budget.

Equally important to retaining the best and the brightest is recruiting them. In an effort to get more officers hired and in the field speedily, the number of investigators assigned to the recruiting and hiring division and the number of annual police academies has been doubled. As a direct result of these changes, the hiring and retention of police officers continues to improve. As of third quarter 2015, 94 officers have been hired. This is an increase of more than 30 percent over 2013. Recruiting and hiring numbers are also trending up in E-911 and the Fire Department.

Cobb County is investing in state of the art technology to keep our community safe. The E-911 Center updated the phone system and software to include automatic call distribution and Text-911 capabilities, along with mobile mapping and automatic public safety vehicle location. The Police Department incorporated the use of license plate recognition systems and rapid ID enhancing the officers' ability to quickly identify wanted criminals. Laptop computers are now being issued to detectives so that they can conduct field investigations. Immediate access to information that previously required a return trip to the office is now available at their fingertips.

The Fire Department recently deployed 60 new thermal imaging cameras, an Advanced Life Support Rescue Truck and new AEDs for fire apparatus and county buildings. These tools enhance response times, help protect property and most importantly, save lives.

And we have so much more planned. Public Safety was a priority in the 2016 SPLOST passed by Cobb County voters last November. Capital projects funded by this program include a new shared training facility, police headquarters, and evidence storage facility. Also included in the 2016 SPLOST was funding for the assigned vehicle program for police officers. This decreases response times at shift change and increases police presence in the community as officers commute to and from work.

I am thankful to Cobb County voters for demonstrating their support for public safety through the passage of the 2016 SPLOST. I am proud of the district commissioners who joined me last month in adopting a budget that fully funds Cobb County's commitment to excellence in public safety.

Most importantly, I am sincerely grateful to all of the first responders who will be recognized during Public Safety Appreciation week. As this week comes and goes, I encourage everyone to remember that every day is a good day to support, celebrate, honor and salute these men and women for their bravery and service to Cobb County.

Timothy D. Lee

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Timothy D. Lee". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Timothy" being the most prominent part.

Chairman, Cobb County